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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 009310

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TAGS: [KJUS](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: EX-PARAS RETAIN INFLUENCE ON THE NORTH ATLANTIC
COAST: A LOOK AT MAGDALENA DEPARTMENT

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood.
Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) Magdalena government, Church, and international representatives said the paramilitary reinsertion program in the Department risks failure because it lacks organization and political support. They reported complaints that many ex-paramilitaries remained armed. Residents feared the military presence in areas vacated by the paramilitaries would not be sufficient, and that the FARC could try to regain control. Center for Reference and Opportunities (CRO) officials said the total demobilized paramilitaries living in Magdalena Department were 2,413, but that the CRO was monitoring only 1,547. This report is the second in a series that focuses on the reinsertion process in what used to be the paramilitary's area of greatest influence, the north Atlantic coast. End summary.

MAGDALENA DEPARTMENT: RECONCILIATION WORK NEEDED

2. (C) Magdalena Department government, Church, and international representatives agreed the reinsertion program in Magdalena suffered a lack of organization and that the situation was worsening. Bishop of Santa Marta Ugo Puccini said Magdalena Governor Trino Luna, who the Bishop claimed was "placed there by the paramilitaries," had organized only one meeting between the Church, private sector, and government to address demobilization and reinsertion. Puccini said he had suggested creating a commission to assist with reconciliation and reinsertion, but the Governor never followed up. The Bishop, who has held his current position for over 18 years, said the majority of the political class in the department was corrupt and had links to the ex-paramilitaries. He did not understand why these politicians, who were supported by the paramilitaries, were not more committed to reinsertion.

3. (C) The Bishop, Human Rights Ombudswoman Lizette

Penaranda, and OAS Regional Coordinator Victoria Figueroa said they had received complaints that some demobilized paramilitaries remained armed and that new criminal groups were also emerging. Penaranda, who has been the Ombudswoman for the Magdalena Department since 1998, said there were paramilitary members who never demobilized and were still operating in the department. For example, commander AKA "Codasi" from the North Bloc still intimidated the population. She had also heard that some demobilized paramilitaries had formed a group of 30 members that were conducting illegal activities in the area of Rio Frio. They said they were AUC, but the group had no structure, operated without a uniform, and charged the population for "security services." Penaranda said this group was responsible for the recent killing of six people. She complained the military was "only 20 meters away" from the site of the killing, but has done nothing. Figueroa noted most complaints she receives come from Chivolo, Plato, and Pivijay.

¶4. (C) The Bishop and Penaranda said the people in the Sierra Nevada were afraid the military presence was insufficient and that the FARC would try to move back into the area. Penaranda explained the military boosted its presence and fought the FARC in the area starting in 2002, but many groups wanted to control the area because of its strategic location and corridors. Before the paramilitaries won control, the FARC and ELN had dominated the area. The paramilitaries took control by intimidating the population and killing anyone suspected of being a FARC or ELN sympathizer.

¶5. (C) Penaranda said the department was previously divided among three former paramilitary leaders: Hernan Giraldo (NW),

Chepe Barrera (SW), and Jorge 40 (the remainder.) There was "gruesome" infighting between Giraldo and Jorge 40 for control over illicit crops in 2001. The people supporting Giraldo were primarily farmers and Giraldo's extensive family, while Jorge 40's people were more urban and educated. Jorge 40 won control of the area, but Giraldo maintained a larger popular following than his rival. Panaranda noted Giraldo is the "para-version of Pablo Escobar" and people "idolize" him. He used his wealth to build roads, schools, drains, and electricity in the region. He was also known for giving money to whomever needed help. Jorge 40 was more strategic with his money, and had bought extensive land holdings--often using the threat of force to drive down the price.

¶6. (C) Penaranda said victims were now trying to reclaim their territories, but they no longer own the lands because of Jorge 40's purchases. In Chivolo municipality, for example, there were 100 families claiming their lands, but they no longer held legal title. Citizens were increasingly speaking out against the ex-paramilitaries and leading authorities to mass graves. She warned, however, there were so many bodies in the Sierra that it will take years to exhume them all. In San Pedro alone, paramilitaries had allegedly killed 800 people. She said she heard that ex-paramilitary leaders have ordered that as many bodies as possible be "disappeared." Penaranda said even though she feels she has the people's confidence, she does not have the resources or the staff to assist in the population's numerous claims.

SANTA MARTA EXPERIENCING SECURITY PROBLEMS

¶7. (C) Our contacts reported increased concerns about the insecurity in Santa Marta, the department capital, which they attributed to paramilitary demobilization. One major contributor to increasing insecurity was score settling among the demobilized. In Santa Marta, the Bishop and OAS representatives reported complaints that ex-paramilitaries were collecting fees or "vacunas" for security and other services. Additionally, the sudden growth in motorcycle-taxis in the city was a ex-paramilitary

phenomenon. Figueroa said she had received complaints that the moto-taxi drivers were collecting intelligence on residents. The Bishop said there should be a greater investment in the demobilized because "the only thing these individuals know how to do is kill and extort."

READ-OUT FROM SANTA MARTA'S CRO

¶8. (C) Santa Marta's Center for Reference and Opportunities (CRO) was new and had a staff of five--one director, 3 professionals, and one technical assistant. Director Gabriel Carrero said there were 2,413 demobilized paramilitaries living in 28 of Magdalena's 30 municipalities. The CRO, however, was monitoring only 1,547. Carrero said he knew where the remaining 900 lived, but that they had not registered with his office.

¶9. (C) Indira Berrocal, coordinator of the Tracking, Monitoring and Evaluation System (SAME), said 1,700 demobilized were visiting the bank every month to collect their government stipend. 1,110 were registered in the initial training and 673 were registered in health services. Of those, SAME only knew of 434 ex-paramilitaries who were working--99 in the formal sector and 335 in the informal sector. The majority were working in construction, sales, tourism, and informal commerce. Eighty-six were working in the GOC's civil auxiliaries program as road assistants or park rangers, and two hundred more would soon start in the program. They get 13,000 pesos a day (USD 6). SAME reported that only 41 worked as moto-taxi drivers. Berrocal said there were 24 agricultural projects run by the GOC for the

ex-paras, displaced persons, and campesinos in the department, and all of these were being carried out on expropriated properties. Seventy-eight demobilized were participating in the projects. 156 had registered for education programs, but only 23 were studying--16 in primary and 7 in high school. There were 20 registered in training courses on crafts, cooking, computers, and machine operations.

¶10. (C) Berrocal cited several problems facing the reinsertion program. The reinserted were not well received by their communities, few formal sector jobs were available, and there were few reconciliation programs in the communities. The demobilized lacked work skills, and the training, education and psychological help they needed was largely unavailable. To ameliorate this, Carrero and Berrocal planned to visit all the mayors of the department to try to involve them in the reinsertion process.

WOOD